

# adams stieglitz weston white

## Stieglitz

The creative artist should be confronted with his own work and his own growth. For the artist to be able to see his own work in public, year after year, is the best possible test of that work. If a work has the universal power to move others, then it will have life. Otherwise, the artist will speak only to himself. The test of a photograph's value, as creative expression, is to place it beside the best of the old masters. If it continues to live, and has a life of its own, it is worthwhile.

One should look at a picture for what is actually there and for what it says — not for the effects that were used and how they were achieved. "When" and "how" a photograph was taken have nothing to do with the essential life of a picture. People who speculate too much about the technical aspects of a photograph never see the photograph itself.

Stieglitz experimented to find out how people responded to his photographs. He would place an equivalent before someone, turn it slowly, stand it in its four possible positions, and ask in which position it meant the most. By performing this experiment, he found that he learned a great deal, not only about the photograph itself, but about the basic attitudes or dominant feelings of the viewer. For example, a preference for an upward movement of clouds must signify something different from a preference towards a downward sweep.

Stieglitz hoped that people would respond to his photographs for the feelings that were expressed within them or the spirit that they possessed. His aim was to make his photographs look so much like everyday photographs that unless they were seen with great perception, they would not be seen. He hoped that they would never be forgotten, having once been looked at.

## Weston

Weston defined self-expression as an illusion in which the artist imagines that he can conceive of and create non-existent forms. "On the contrary," wrote Weston, "the most 'abstract' art is derived from forms in nature." When these are interpreted with biased opinion, or meanings are read into them, the resulting conclusions are filled with meaningless distortion. A work of art may be said to say more or less than it actually does.

The value of the photograph as a work of art depends primarily on the photographer's vision before the exposure was made, but if exposure records the photographer's seeing, developing and printing execute it. Therefore, no matter how fine the original vision of the photographer might be, it must be faithfully



**In this article are presented  
the photographic concepts and ideas  
that Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston,  
Ansel Adams and Minor White  
developed on “experiencing the photograph.”**

# experiencing the photograph

carried out in the subsequent procedures or the resulting print will suffer. A photograph's artistic value can only be determined by an examination of the finished print.

The main reason that a photograph appeals so strongly to our emotions is due to the quality of authenticity. We, as spectators, accept the authority of a photograph because we believe that we would have seen that scene or object exactly so if we had been there. Weston pointed out that the human eye is incapable of this. First of all, the photographer does not reproduce a scene exactly. Secondly, it is doubtful that we could identify the original scene from having seen the photograph. Yet, it is this belief in the reality of a photograph that calls up a strong response in the spectator and enables him to participate in the artist's experience. The spectator can only respond and participate in the original experience to the extent that the completed work realizes a depth of understanding about the subject matter and presents the subject with uniqueness and vitality.

Weston expressed the belief that it doesn't make any difference what subject matter is used to communicate a feeling toward life. Shells, bodies and clouds are contemporary subject matter, but they can portray universal feelings.

The photographer should allow his photographs to “speak” for themselves since it is possible for the photographer to weaken his work by trying to read into each photograph its esoteric derivation. People will only get from a photograph what they bring to it.

The shell photographs of Weston were called mystical, erotic and sensuous. They were said to contain both the innocence of natural things and the morbidity of the sophisticated, distorted mind. Tina Modotti wrote:

... Since the creation of an artist is the result of his state of mind and soul at the time of the creation, these last photographs of yours clearly show that you are leaning toward mysticism.  
... At the same time they are very sensuous.

The Mexican artists Diego Rivera and Orozco were affected on the physical side by the photographs. Weston found this difficult to understand. He did not have any physical reaction while working with the shells, nor was he attempting to record erotic symbolism. The shell has a sensuous quality which is combined with a deep spiritual significance. Weston believed it is this combination of the



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physical and spiritual in a shell which can make it such an important abstract of life. Weston had a clear vision of the aesthetic form of shells. He knew that he was recording his inner feelings toward life, but it was not until the negatives were actually developed that he realized what he had felt — for when he worked, he was unconscious of what he was doing.

Some saw phallic symbolism in Weston's photography, but Weston himself denied it. "There could not be phallic symbolism where none was intended or felt," he said. Weston did not premeditate symbolism of any kind. He did not feel that direct symbolism ever goes into the work of a really important artist. If symbolism exists in Weston's work, *it is because he saw parts and fragments as universal symbols*. He understood the relativity of all things, and the resemblance of natural forms to each other.

The New York artist, Edward Biberman, had a logical and possible solution to the question of why some people see phallic symbolism in Weston's work. He said, in effect, that Weston saw vegetables and other natural or fundamental forms with such direct honesty and intensity that a tremendous force, like sex — which permeates all nature, could not help but be revealed. All basic forms are so closely related as to be visually equivalent, according to Biberman.

Weston saw parts of life in relation to the whole. Their essence was recorded with a simplification which Weston liked to call an "abstraction." The literal minded person immediately begins to find what a thing resembles, and so a back may be taken for a pear. Knees may be taken for shell forms, and rocks can be taken for almost anything imaginable. The creative artist is aware of universal spiritual connotations in his work, but he is never concerned with literary allusions.

The radical writer and painter, Alfaro Siqueiros, wrote a brilliant review of Weston's 1925 Mexican exhibition, in which he said:

... In Weston's photographs, the texture, the physical quality, of things is rendered with the utmost exactness: the rough is rough, the smooth is smooth, flesh is alive, stone is hard. The things have a definite proportion and weight, and are placed at a clearly defined distance one from another. In one word, the beauty which these photographs of Weston's possess is Photographic Beauty!

Weston received such widely divergent opinions from various artists and critics that he soon realized there could be no universal standard of criticism. He listened to fresh, unbiased opinions as readily as to those of an important critic. He accepted and rejected criticism and went his own way. The realization had to come through himself when he was ready. This acceptance and rejection also entered into his approach to the work of others. He took from others what he could understand, because he believed that more cannot be taken without merely copying.

Weston judged his photography according to how it affected him emotionally. Whenever he could feel a Bach fugue in his work, he knew that he had arrived.

## Adams

Does the photographer communicate with others, or really just talk to himself? Adams thinks that 95 percent of contemporary art is simply talking to ourselves. Creative camera vision, along with the appropriate techniques, will allow us to deviate from reality with almost any subject material. True communication requires more than just creating an image in the mind's eye, and then producing it



as a print. No matter what this image means to the photographer, it does not have essential value unless it enables the spectator to comprehend the realities of the world and of the spirit.

A photograph is different from an event or a physical object. Its inner meaning, or emotional content, cannot be defined in factual terms. To make matters worse, it is practically impossible to remember moods and emotional impressions. However, if the spectator can recall the details of form, line and tone in the photograph, he will derive a considerable amount of information from the picture.

Every individual will have his own personal approach to exploring a photograph. There is no rigid, systematic method. However, Adams points out that the photograph can reveal a great deal more than the external form of an object. Interpretive exaggeration begins where straight realism leaves off. He writes:

... It is obvious that the photograph does not duplicate Nature, it only symbolizes it. In looking at a photograph, therefore, we grasp symbolic or emotional impressions, and the power of these impressions is augmented by their inter-relationships. . . .

Adams feels that if the spectator perceives the emotional meaning of the tonal values that are created by the photographer, he will understand what the photographer desires to convey. In addition, exploring a photograph helps sharpen our sensitivity to picture content and relationships. The elements of a photograph help us to create impressions within ourselves. The original subject can be visualized and recreated from a photograph, or we can visualize what we would have done with the subject had we made the photograph.

When we explore a photograph, we should try to understand what the creative intention of the photographer was. Whatever is included in a photograph should have significance. Perception and awareness, on the part of the spectator, will enable him to perceive meaning from details that seem insignificant. Occasionally, forms may be without literal meaning; but beautiful in their balance of form, texture and mass. If they are aesthetically pleasing, they can be enjoyed in and of themselves.

The photographic image can stand alone without a verbalized interpretation. Too much verbalization might result in a distortion of

what the photograph communicates, or a criticism about the objectives of the photographer.

Adams believes that what we see in a photograph is a private affair. Our reactions to a photograph should be discussed only if we wish to do so. However, it is important to keep our feelings intact for expression through photography. "In my opinion," writes Adams, "demanding a student reveal himself through verbalized symbols and reactions borders dangerously on psychoanalysis." To think of an image, as a glorified Rorschach test, is not a part of Adams' teaching philosophy. He feels that the aesthetic-emotional reaction to a photograph is such a personal reaction, that to verbalize upon it can, in some cases, produce traumatic effects.

When our feelings and reactions are expressed photographically, we need not express them by verbalizing about our photographs. They are in the print for all to read. The perception and awareness of the spectator should allow him to understand the creative intentions of the photographer. If the spectator has visual awareness, he will be able to perceive meaning from the photograph. If the photographer has creative vision, and an adequate technique, he will be able to express himself photographically. If the photographer understands humanity as well, he may be able to say something of importance.

#### **White**

The photograph can express an inner state of mind. When photography is used in this manner, the physical nature of the subject is im-

only possible source of his experience. When the link to the original subject is broken or stretched thin, the spectator is left to his own associations. White believes that this intangible realm of controlling the spectator's mental image will be the artist photographer's future field of communication.

We make mental adjustments and permit shades of gray to stand for color, two dimensions to stand for three and picture size to stand for life size; but in spite of our acceptance of photographic authenticity, a photograph of a tree is not the tree itself. The photograph is not reality. When the photographer is freed from thinking only in terms of surfaces, texture, form and substance, he can use these elements to pursue images of poetic beauty and truth. Symbolism, metaphors and equivalents are the pictorial elements which the photographer can use to depict the inner world — to render the invisible visible.

The photographer loses control of communication when the spectator is left to his own associations. The only dependable way of working in the private world of other people's associations and mental images is to channel the spectator's association with a title. A photograph may need a title because it does not function as a source of information. It may be meaningful only if the subject is treated as a kind of peg to hang symbols upon. At the opposite extreme, the identification of subject matter can be so obvious that a title is necessary to suggest how the photograph might be experienced more fully.

The objectivity of the camera enables the photographer to turn it in-

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material. To understand this intangible concept, it is helpful to think of photography as a mirage, the camera as if it were a metamorphosing machine and the photograph as if it were a metaphor. As the degree of metamorphosis increases, the original subject has less and less bearing on the ultimate meaning of the photograph, and the mental image within the spectator becomes increasingly the

ward and use it as a means of self-discovery. However, an image can be a record of an inner state that the photographer neither remembers seeing nor experiencing at the moment of exposure. A meaning or event, occurring in a photograph, may be entirely independent of the photographer. When an "urgency" is present it seems to find many mirrors of itself in the visible world. The photograph



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which is a record of some inner state can function as a means of self-discovery because it can help the photographer to understand what his inner state was at the time the photograph was made. If this kind of photograph is exhibited, the camera can hold up a piece of the photographer's psyche for public display.

The "mirror image" is in the realm of Things For What Else They Are or what things are in the process of becoming. Mirroring starts with the self-portrait. If the photographer changes expression, he brings some inner change to the surface of his face for the camera to see. In effect, his facial expression acts as a mirror of some aspect of his inner-self. Mirroring, however, goes much farther than that. The similarities of any kind that one feels to be parallel to one's self may act as a mirror, at least to the photographer.

The "probe image" is one that causes a spectator to look into himself. Unfortunately, because audiences find it discomfiting to take a searching look at themselves, there is a tendency to dismiss these penetrating photographs as psychologically distressing. The "probe image" seems to have an unpredictable life of its own — some find it discomfiting, some find it to be therapy; others find it exciting. There is no sure way to plan a photograph so that it will act as a probe.

The "dream image" appears to be a visual message from the psyche to the photographer. The image should be read by the photographer, but it is a personal message and not really meant for public viewing. One can learn to interpret "dream images" just about as easily as one learns to read a new language; however not all photographs should be read.

The "message image" is similar to the "dream image" in appearance, in the necessity to know enough to recognize when a message is present, and in the knowledge that is required to read it.

Both "dream" and "message" images appear as hard reality. The difference between them is quite simple. The "message image" comes from a source independent of the photographer's psyche. "The content," says White, "is new material that the person could never

have thought of. The content is objective not imagined. This is the remarkable part of the 'message image'."

The equivalent establishes the core of the kind of art photography will be. In this approach, the subject is treated without regard for either its individuality or its essence, or the reaction it causes in the photographer; but it is treated as the medium of expression. The photograph functions as a metaphor, and the camera sees through the world of surfaces to the implications of the subject.

Stieglitz used clouds and people for equivalents, but it makes no difference what subject matter is used. Equivalence is not a style. It is a function between the spectator, the photograph and extending in time perhaps to the person who made it. It can be a mirror of one's inner-self. If a feeling of loneliness is uppermost in the consciousness of the

## ***The objectivity of the camera enables the photographer to turn it inward and use it as a means of self-discovery***

photographer, an old building, a part, a pond of lilies or even a lamp post will provide the subject matter for the camera. The same subject matter can communicate other feelings as well.

It was Stieglitz's response to his subject matter which made the equivalence. This special response may be described as an image taken into a person and retained because it is wanted. Once this image is within a person, it is turned into his own private image. This private image will cross a person's mind from time to time, even though it may not be understood. Because of some human emotion arising out of fear, love, annoyance, anger, joy, or human trust, etc., there is a desire or a compulsion to remember the image. It is held close within the person, and it therefore changes him in some way.

An equivalent evokes a feeling similar to one which already exists in some other event or photograph. It works by the power of suggestion; and the mind of the spectator must get past the intellectual symbolism of the photograph, because the photograph should evoke a feeling, not an intellectual idea.

A photograph may act as an equivalent to another photograph in this manner: Photograph A is ex-

pressive. It has meaning only for the photographer in that it is a stage of growth. Photograph A  $\frac{1}{8}$  gives feeling to you but also to someone else, and is derived from self-exploration. If Photograph B has the feeling of A  $\frac{1}{8}$ , it is said to be equivalent to A  $\frac{1}{8}$ .

When a photograph functions for a given person as an equivalent, it is acting as a symbol or plays the role of a metaphor for something that is beyond the subject photographed. It is both a record of something in front of the camera and simultaneously, a spontaneous symbol. (A spontaneous symbol is one which develops automatically to fill the need of the moment.) Equivalence is a two-way reaction between the photograph plus the person looking at the photograph and the person's mental image. It is only in the mental image held that there is any possibility of a metaphorical function occurring.

A photograph functions as an equivalent in the viewer's psyche by the mechanisms of "projection" and "empathy." If the viewer is not subject-identification bound, he will respond to the expressive qualities of shapes and forms on a subconscious level. The effect that seems to be associated with equivalence may be described in this manner: when both the subject matter and manner of rendering are transcended, that which seems to be matter becomes what seems to be spirit.

Equivalence revolves around the "remembered image." What we remember is peculiarly our own, because various distortions occur and change this recall image after the original stimulation has gone. These alterations from the original come from the individual himself, and so the response to an equivalent must remain a private, untranslatable experience which lies entirely within the individual.

Any photograph can function as an equivalent to someone, sometime, someplace. If the individual viewer realizes that for him what he sees in a photograph corresponds to something within himself, if the photograph mirrors something in himself, then his experience is some degree of equivalence. An equivalent, tells the viewer in effect,



"I had a feeling about something and here is a metaphor of my feeling." What is significant here is that what the photographer had a feeling about was not for the subject he photographed, but for something else. The forms of a cloud may correspond to the photographer's feelings about a certain person and remind him of the person. If the spectator catches in the photograph the same feeling that the photographer experienced, and if the spectator's feelings are similar to the photographer's, then the photographer has aroused a known feeling in him.

***The photographer can purposely strengthen the linkage between the viewer and the subject . . . or weaken it***

The power of the equivalent, as a vehicle of creative expression, lies in the fact that it can convey and evoke feelings about things, situations and events which for one reason or another can not be photographed. The equivalent enables the photographer to use the forms and shapes of objects for their expressive-evocative qualities. The equivalent does not express the feeling that the photographer had for the object that he photographed; it is the expression of a feeling that lies within the man himself. The plastic material of the visual world is used for the photographer's expressive purposes.

Objects of forms can be photographed to obtain an image with specific suggestive powers. In this way, the viewer can be directed into a state of specific and known feeling within himself. Materials possessing an infinite variety of forms, such as clouds, water or ice, can suggest all sorts of emotions, tactile encounters and intellectual speculations in the spectator. These reactions are formed and supported by the nature of the material but they maintain an independent identity which allows the photographer to choose what he wishes to express.

The equivalent permits the photographer to emphasize the transforming power of the medium over its recording power, by causing the subject to stand for something else. It is equally strong; and it permits the photographer to express a feeling or emotion, or to photograph a subject that is un-photogenic. At one level the subject matter of the equivalent is simply a record, but at another level it may function to

arouse certain planned sensations and emotions.

It is important to realize that a photograph may be a sketch rather than a complete photograph. The "realized" photograph is a clearly stated idea-feeling which can progress by stages out of the photographer's growing awareness and absorption in a place. In the sketch photograph, the idea-feeling is not clearly stated, and it may be necessary for the photographer to re-shoot the first setup or its equivalent until the sketches lead towards the final complete photograph.

The photograph can serve as an excitant to cause some degree of experience in people. The photographer can purposely strengthen the linkage between the viewer and the subject with representational photographs; or he can weaken it with photographs in which the subject is hardly recognizable or not recognizable at all. But, if the spectator of a photograph has lived an experience which is similar to the idea-feeling of the photograph, the photograph will have the capacity to evoke that idea-feeling in the store of the viewer's images.

There is a correct physical procedure for experiencing photographs. It is important to make certain that no interruptions will occur that might disturb our efforts to experience a photograph. It is by being still with ourselves, that we can make ourselves receptive to the suggestions coming from the image that well up into the conscious mind from the unconscious.

The photograph should be placed in a position where it is free from distracting backgrounds, where the lighting is good and where the spectator can sit comfortably erect with his body and shoulders square to the picture. The spectator should relax prior to the crucial moment when he first engages the image. When changes occur in the image, the work period may begin. These changes may vary with the individual. For some, the perception of space in depth within the image suddenly increases. Others will experience changes in the brightness or size of the image. ●

(to be continued)

# What counts in the end can often begin here:



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# experiencing the photograph

In the May issue of *PBPN* we presented the photographic concepts and ideas that Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston and Ansel Adams developed on "experiencing the photograph." Minor White's philosophies, being the lengthiest, were only briefly discussed. In this article we will conclude this discussion. In May we ended with White's attitudes on the placement of the photograph and here we begin with the active work of scanning the image until everything in the photograph has been seen and noted.



The active work of experiencing a photograph consists of scanning the image until everything in the photograph has been seen and noted. The spectator should become acquainted with each object, with every detail within the photograph and with the relationships between objects and the space they inhabit. When all of the relationships within the photograph have been observed, the spectator should bring his technical knowledge and philosophies about the medium to bear on the image. The spectator analyzes composition with the surface mind; with intuition he feels the relation of the composition to the picture content. The spectator can establish empathy with the image by using his imagination to project himself into the various objects within the photograph.

At the end of the work period, the state of stillness is turned off in brief steps. A final impression of the

image should be taken before we look elsewhere. Then, the experience should be held on to in silence. The various things which have been seen and noted should be reviewed as related visuals.

One should first feel the emotional significance of a photograph and then use intellectual analysis to bear out or disprove these feelings. To look at a photograph with a predisposed mind may blind us as to what the photograph says. This method of print analysis is based on the contemplation of visible relationships as well as intellectual and emotional meanings. All of the visible occurrences in a photograph can be analyzed for what they are. The various concepts, such as light quality and space, have a bearing on the mood of a photograph as well as a profound effect on the meaning of the photograph. Although many concepts and elements overlap and combine to establish the mood of a photograph, they can be isolated in order to describe their functional effect on the picture. For example, if we can disassociate in our minds the light occurring in the print from the subject of the print, the light itself can be felt to have an effect on the total mood.

Concepts are useful only to get at the significance of a photograph. The important thing is to identify the idea-feeling of the photographer and to understand what it is the photographer is saying. If the photograph is emotionally a blank, deliberate analysis of the various con-

cepts may help us to perceive the significance of the photograph.

Reading a photograph may be based on what it reminds you of. It is a verbalization of your experience of a photograph. The process of reading a photograph converts a non-verbal experience into a verbal one. Non-verbal communication does not involve the spoken word. It may be conscious or unconscious. It may be made by gestures or through the meaning of objects themselves. It may use signs and symbolism.

Readings of photojournalistic work should generally be done as "non-verbal" communication. Readings of pictorial photographs should generally be done in the light of the subject and how the photographer has used the subject matter. The reason for reading a photograph is that it enables us to understand what is going on in the photograph, technique-wise and communication-wise.

Any photograph that communicates does so because a person is reading it. The process of reading a photograph can be an intellectual effort, an intuitive one, or a combination of both. To make a "reading," verbalization is necessary. One has to speak or write about one's experience of a photograph. In the process of translating a visual experience into verbal expression, slips are bound to occur and so verbalizing should be done only after the photograph

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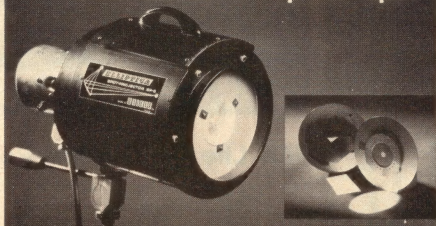
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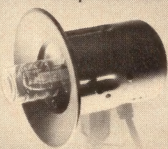
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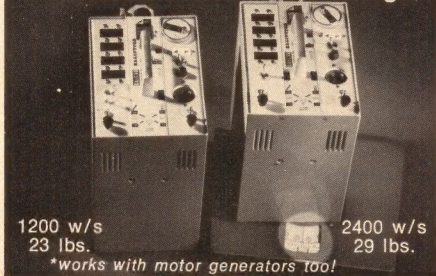
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# experiencing

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is experienced and it should be done only if there is sufficient reason.

A photograph must be "read" without criticism. When we dislike a photograph, we immediately shut off any further communication. When we like a photograph, we are pleased to carry on a relationship with it through an interchange of visual and verbal symbols. Once evaluation is suspended, one can concentrate on the significance of the picture.

What you find in a photograph will be your own. There is not a right answer and many wrong ones. There are as many right answers as there are persons who contemplate the picture, and the only wrong answer is no experience at all. Whether the more active or more passive method is used, the result of the contemplation is to be experience. This may happen through a flame burst of understanding, or it may occur after the picture has been lived with for some period of time. A photograph may be engaged casually by the subconscious mind for weeks or months before it is set up as a target for intense concentration. During this time the unconscious engages the photograph in its own way, and all of the various things that are present in the photograph provide a rich feast for the subconscious mind.

No one can predict what another person will experience when he reads a photograph. The experience must be accepted for what it is. Moreover, once the surface meaning of a photograph is identified it takes concentration and discipline to read a photograph.

Many contemporary photographers present images that are intended to cause the viewer to see

something of himself. The photograph causes the viewer to be confronted with something of himself. If what he sees is unpleasant, some part of himself may be unpleasant. If what he sees is magnificent, it is because something beautiful in him has been magnified.

The creative photographer must practice the most conscious criticism. Is what he saw present in the photograph? If not, does the photograph reveal something he could not see by himself? He must either be willing to take the responsibility for the accident and show it as his own, or consider it as a sketch for his subconscious to digest. Furthermore, he needs to study the reactions of the viewers: do they match his own? come close? or depart in some other direction? Visual communication demands conscious criticism and an understanding of what the prints do, as compared to what we want them to do.

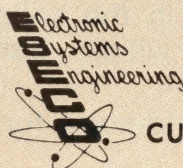
Our involvement with images is based on associations and past experiences. Frequently an image will serve as a memory jog to form associations that lead the viewer away from the photograph and into his past life. The photographer can predict neither the specific memory jog nor its effect on a particular viewer. When the train of associations leads the viewer into the realm of past memories that have no bearing on the image, both the photograph and the photographer are lost.

If the viewer keeps his attention on the image, universal associations will prevail that are common to both the viewer and photographer. It is only when the viewer attends to the image at hand that the photographer has a chance to make valid predictions of the viewer's potential experience of the photograph.

A person in a state of identification with something can twist almost any image into a mirror of his

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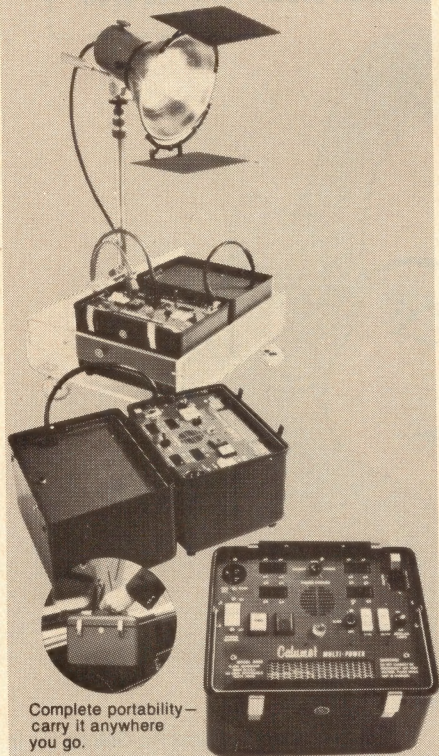
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or her own inner state. The process is somewhat like the train of associations set off by the memory jog; except that it leads into the present. As with the memory jog, the photographer can never hope to predict experience when this interference occurs.

Clichés or stock answers reveal a poor imagination on the part of the viewer and sidetrack involvement with the image. The most original image in the world can elicit stock answers from a person who has not been able to make contact with the photograph.

A form of talking that is a substitute for any contact with the image is called "verbalizing." It is monotonous, unrelated to the content of the image, and closely related to stock answers.

A person's stand in relation to religion, politics, schools of art or fields of photography (doctrinal adhesions) can be a strong barrier to involvement with images.



Personal and emotional tie-ups are generally unpredictable. Inhibitions not only affect a person's life, they affect his acceptance of images. In an apparently random way, they determine the viewer's acceptance or rejection of certain kinds of photographs. Inhibitions in life are carried over to looking at images in photography, and they have a similar effect on response as prejudices and preconceptions.

Feelings of inadequacy occur when there is a feeling that the photo image in question has a "right" answer, or a specific meaning, and the person is afraid to make a mistake. There may be a variety of causes, including: a real inability to verbalize, a determination to keep the visual experience free of verbal entanglements or simply a failure to get involved and a reluctance to admit that no reaction has taken place.

There may be a refusal to get involved with something that "does not turn us on." This block to understanding can be overcome by willful "turning on" by the viewer himself.

Either-or thinking sabotages seeing because pet theories can make us think that no other kind of image is fit for anything. It is a trap that critics frequently fall into.

We sometimes avoid an issue when under pressure. This commonly occurs in a classroom, workshop or interview situation, when a person is expected to externalize his experience. Avoidance takes place when the viewer must say something, but there is little or no involvement with the image. The spectator may: describe the subject; describe and criticize the composition; describe or question the technique. Technical questions are a standard reaction. Sometimes, the viewer wants to find out how the image was made in order to later go out and do the same. The description may mask angers aroused because the spectator is forced to observe his failure to make contact with the image, or the spectator may describe the obvious because he is afraid of making mistakes. Saying, "I like it" without elaboration is another form of avoidance.

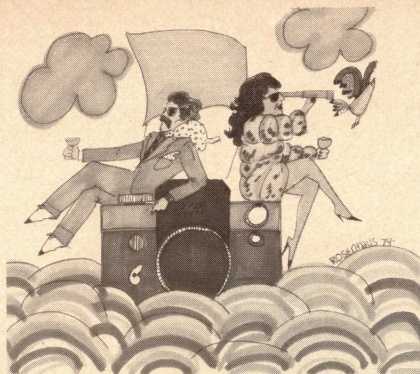
It is important to guard against emotional blocks to understanding which can occur when intellectual analysis takes place. Responses may be emotional as well as intellectual. It is possible for an image to hold something for the spectator intellectually and be an emotional blank.

The study and evaluation of responses is a means by which the photographer can go outside of himself and study the effects of a photograph on other people. By evaluating the implications of a response, the photographer is able to really get an insight into other people so that he is in a better position to communicate with them. Response evaluation serves as a feedback technique for the photographer.

The fact that a rapport between the photographer and his subject







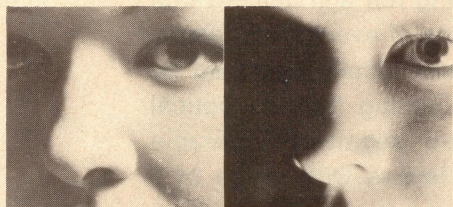
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has been recorded does not insure a response in others. Response evaluation can show how little a photograph has actually communicated, or it can reveal things we never saw in our own photographs.

The matter of responses and their meaning is a complex study. A response can be physical, emotional, associational or intellectual. It can also be on more than one level at once. The key to the study has been found to be reducible to the axiom: when people talk about photographs they talk about themselves first and the photographs next, if at all. Responding to a visual experience is largely a matter of getting rid of blocks and inhibitions that stand in the way of freely experiencing what is before us. If the photographer can recognize an emotional block in himself, he will understand it and know when it occurs in others because he will already have understood it within himself.

## harvest work

from 34

bracketing means one exposure is more correct — that the mood also has been captured.

What was being tested was the response of each film to each filter. The films were selected because of a) the pastel range of Fujicolor, b) the versatility of High Speed Ektachrome and c) the dramatic effects of infra-red. Other color films which similarly respond to certain color ranges, as does Ansco to yellow, for example, were ruled out because the Kodak and Fuji films could be processed by a custom lab. Thus, predictability was gained through control since the same lab which processed the tests also processed the film.

When the location film came back, I learned that Fujicolor had too great a negative reciprocity failure — the before-dawn and after-dusk shots had to be exposed for a longer period than the film had tolerance for. All the exposures taken at these times on Fujicolor came out black or with insufficient differentiation. Fortunately, I had used two bodies on two tripods and those on High Speed Ektachrome were properly exposed.

From the tests four filters were selected: chocolate black, mauve, vermillion and a vivid yellow. In ad-

The identification of subject matter is the lowest common denominator of a response to a photograph. A meaningful experience with a photograph requires some degree of imagination on the spectator's part if there is to be an interaction between the photograph and the viewer of the photograph. At best, a photograph is a step towards a mental image, and it is the mental image evoked in another person by which photography communicates.

"Multivalence" is a term that refers to the possibility of more than one meaning or interpretation to the same response. For example, "I like it" can mean many things. The person may be inarticulate, the photograph may not offend him in any way or he may really like it. When the response is multivalent, the photographer encounters the problem of what to do with the

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dition to these gels, I had several color-correction filters whose effects on High Speed Ektachrome were familiar to me and a G filter for infra-red. I mentally anticipated situations for each combination and left a week later for Christian Brothers. Thus I had done some homework, which also included studying some old paintings of grapes, in order to give structure or form to my intuitions.

At Christian Brothers I was introduced to Brother Thomas, headmaster of the Christian Brothers Boys' School on the property, who was to look after me during my stay. I was invited to sleep and eat at the Novitiate, also on the grounds. I accepted the invitation because it meant no highway driving, which I find wearisome. I was given the use of a rugged van so that I could travel on the rough roads that wound through the vineyard hills.

Brother Thomas and I talked and walked that afternoon. I asked him for his favorite vistas, having understood upon analysis and reflection, that close-ups and landscapes were all that I was going to be able to photograph under the strike conditions. Also, none of the brothers nor the children who attended the school were to be in the photographs.

I asked Brother Thomas and, later, the groundskeepers for their favorite spots, because people living in a place know where to photograph, whether or not they are



# experiencing

from 44

response. Right at the beginning he is faced with the problem of how well an individual verbalizes his response.

The person who doesn't want to do self-searching either has no imagination or is deliberately blinding himself to visual experiences that might disturb his basic security. The full range of photographic possibilities of communication-evocation is a closed world to him.

Some persons react as if they had never seen the photograph they are looking at. These individuals would probably give substantially the same response to any photograph. Any photograph would mirror back to them whatever mild compulsion was uppermost at the time.

Verbalizing is a means of escape from life and it indicates that the spectator is avoiding contact with certain or all forms of life as they are represented in a photograph. Verbalization is full of clichés and indicates a lack of contact with the image.

When the photograph is independent of the original subject, the



viewer may reject the photograph because he can't identify the original subject or he may willingly engage the photograph because it is an event in its own right. Photographs in which the subject is hard to identify separate viewers into two groups: those who are offended at being denied subject identification and reject the photograph — and a second group of sophisticated viewers who will accept the photograph for its own sake.

The subject-recognizable photograph separates an audience into

classes along different lines. The literal photograph separates the people-oriented from the nature lovers. The viewer who is a purist will tend to prefer the representational photograph. White has found that the literal photographs acts as a kind of bridge from the viewer back to the original subject and the non-literal acts more as a direct source of experience.

Responses can be classified as Negative, Neutral and Pertinent. A negative or neutral response may turn into a pertinent one even while a person is talking about a photograph. If there is a lapse of time between seeing the photograph and the attempt to verbalize, a change of response is common. The response change of pertinent to neutral or negative is less likely to happen.

Negative responses prevent the viewer from understanding any statement a photograph might possibly communicate or any feeling it might evoke. However, White warns that this must be taken as a general statement because some people seem to take a delight in photographs that they hate. No one will remember pictures to which they are indifferent.

A "no comment" response often indicates a lack of sensitivity, at least to the photograph in question. The same response to a number of photographs may indicate either a lack of sensitivity to visual matters or an inarticulate but visual-minded individual. This type of person may be able to express himself with gestures or pencil and paper drawings. Sometimes a drawing together with a few words will reveal the spectator's thoughts or a state of feeling.

The "I like it — I don't like it" response indicates an incapacity to communicate verbally, or it can indicate a lack of sensitivity on the part of the individual. This response may or may not be true, because the spectator may feel he has to make some kind of response and so he takes the easiest way out. If he tells you he likes it, he may think your photograph is better or he may be trying to make you happy.

If a person rejects a photograph, he closes his mind to further traffic with that image. If the photographer can discover the reasons, they usually provide the photographer with information. Sometimes the photographer is not at fault. The reasons may have little or no connection with the photograph.

The "I just love it" reaction usually indicates that the image has

triggered the individual into remembering some former state of euphoria. The phrase is often followed by a glowing account of the remembered event.

Persons who would have taken it differently, or indicate that it should



be cropped differently, rarely see the photograph as a statement by another person. The changer either substitutes some problem of his own, or finds his own photograph within the picture. He seldom responds to the photograph itself.

This is not really a response but a return to the original subject. The spectator is not responding to what the photograph says, but he is using wrong material for what he would like to say. The important question is this: is the spectator changing the photograph because he would like to make it into his picture, or is he changing it to clarify what the photographer is trying to say?

A person may feel compelled to say something about a given photograph because he has agreed beforehand to do so. Stock answers, such as "life and death" or "old and new" may appear out of desperation or when a person is indifferent to a particular photograph.

If a person is a habitual bluffer, the response may be interesting because it takes considerable intelligence to talk one's way through a photograph in a convincing manner. Sometimes the bluffer's response may be pertinent to the photographer because the bluffer may inadvertently cause a moment of understanding for the photographer. On other occasions, as the bluffer talks, what comes off the top of his head may lead him toward understanding something about the photograph.

If a photographer consistently inspires "neutral responses," he should seriously consider some other form of self-expression or find another group of persons for his audience. This response indicates that communication is not taking place.